

Vendetta in Peru

The ouster by Peru's military dictatorship of Pedro Beltran as director and owner of La Prensa of Lima is purely and simply a savage vendetta against one of the most respected journalists in the Americas. La Prensa had criticized junta policies but had never indulged in partisan or personal attacks on the ruling generals or questioned their motives.

Mr. Beltran's "offense" is so ludicrous that it would be laughed out of court—had the generals not purged the Supreme Court in 1970 and appointed their own handpicked judges. Indeed, only a puppet court could have ruled valid the junta's Orwellian "Statute of Freedom of the Press," under which the action against Mr. Beltran has been taken.

That bizarre law requires newspaper editors and publishers to reside in Peru a minimum of six months a year. But authorities now insist this does not mean the calendar year; and they have moved against Mr. Beltran because he stayed abroad eleven days beyond six months prior to returning last week from a stint as visiting professor at the University of Virginia.

This is not the first time a military dictator has tried to silence La Prensa. When General Manuel Odria had Mr. Beltran arrested in 1956 for refusing to publish under censorship, La Prensa employees escorted him through Lima streets and packed the jail in a show of solidarity. Not long thereafter the dictatorship was dissolved and Mr. Beltran subsequently served Peru with distinction as Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

This time, Mr. Beltran at 75 is up against a more formidable—and more unscrupulous—enemy. In his fight against governmental oppression he has the solid support of free journalists, as well as those striving to be free in all parts of the hemisphere.